

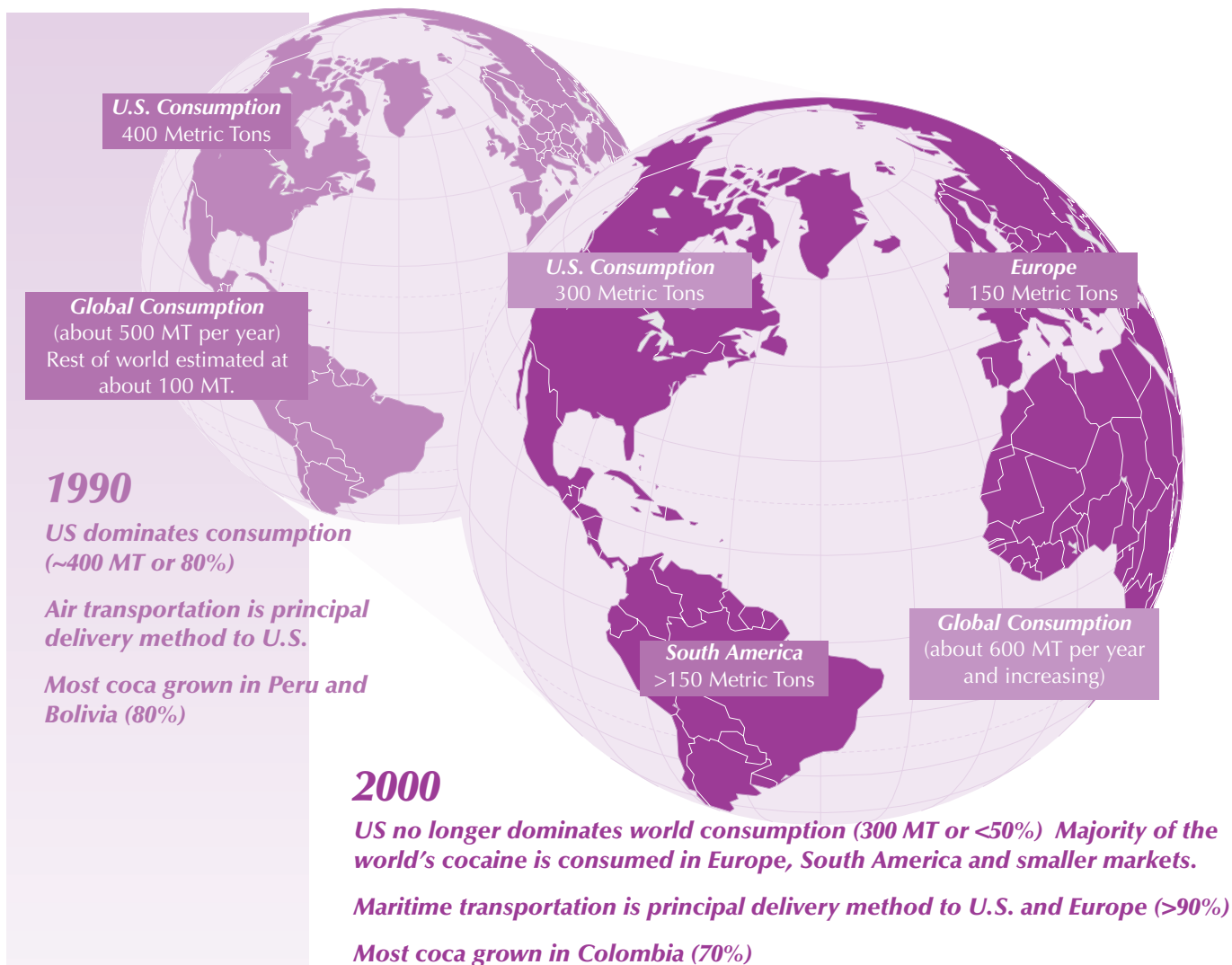
THE COCAINE THREAT

A HEMISPHERIC PERSPECTIVE

Cocaine – the threat has evolved

Consumption is a worldwide problem

Cooperation is key to confront this global threat

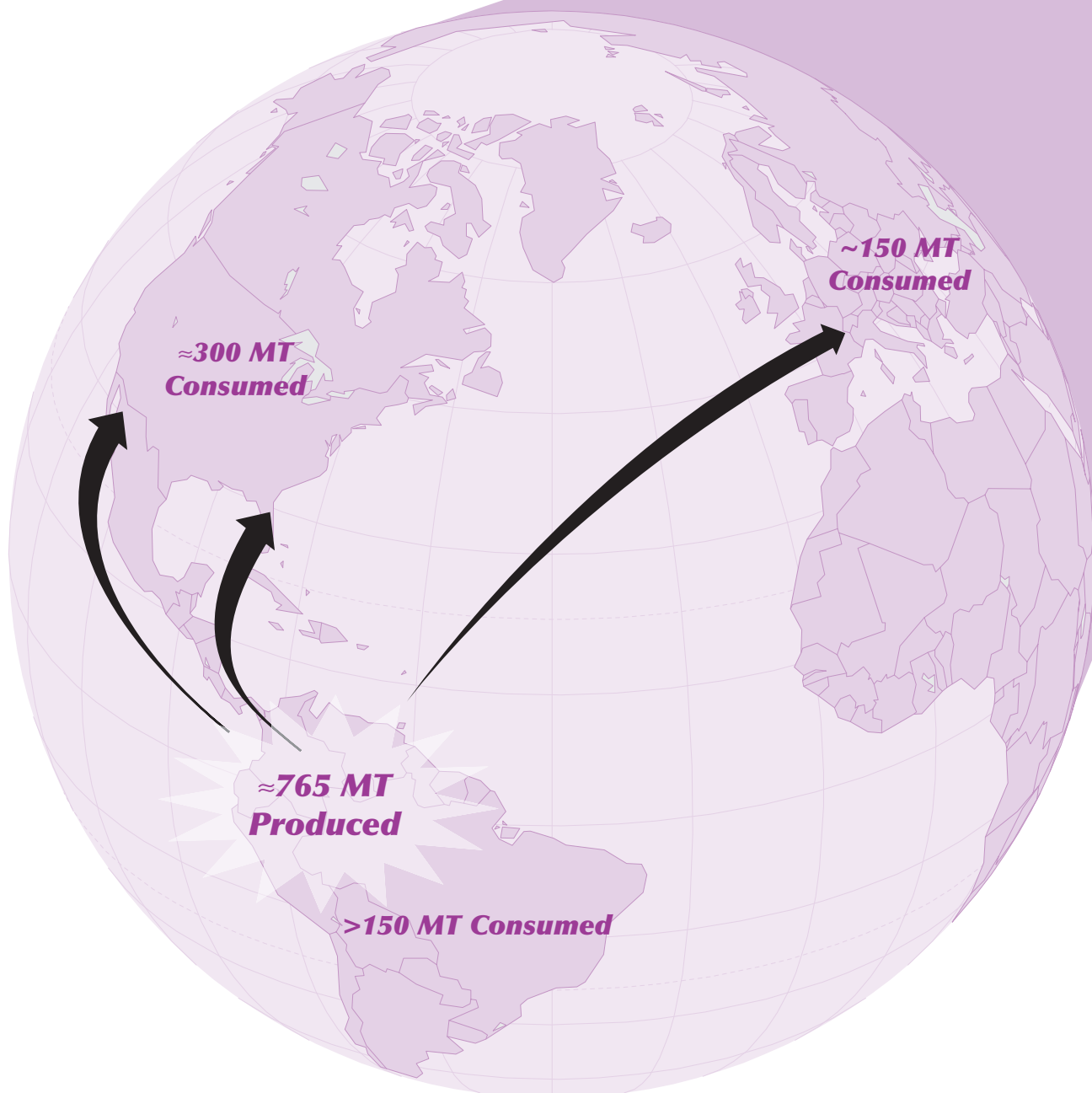


Cocaine threat has evolved

International drug trafficking has become more sophisticated over the last decade as it has adapted to the hemisphere's counternarcotics strategies. Although our collective efforts to reduce drug trafficking in the past ten years have kept the drug syndicates on the defensive, they still moved hundreds of tons of cocaine not only to the United States and Western Europe, but to markets in Latin America, Asia, Africa and other regions.



The most striking change is the continuing, steady decline in the Andean coca crop, the source of the cocaine destined for the United States. Even taking into account a marked expansion of cultivation in Colombia, overall Andean coca cultivation totals are at a new low. The most dramatic declines occurred in Peru and Bolivia, formerly the world's two principal coca producers. Aggressive drug crop eradication, interdiction operations, and alternative economic development programs in Peru and Bolivia reduced coca cultivation in those countries 66% and 55%, respectively, since 1995. In large part due to successful counternarcotics programs in Peru and Bolivia, coca cultivation in the Andean Region has shifted to southern areas in Colombia. In another important change, during the decade of the 1990s cocaine trafficking dramatically shifted from an emphasis on transportation by air to maritime trafficking. More than 90% of the cocaine delivered to the United States and Europe is now transported by maritime routes.



Consumption is a worldwide problem

The United States remains the largest single market for cocaine, but the long-term decline and leveling off in US demand for cocaine has caused the drug syndicates to seek out new markets. Although Europe and South America have been their principal targets, they are not the only regions experiencing a major influx of cocaine. Though the volume may not be as great, cocaine is now available in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

Cocaine Bound for North America – 35% through Caribbean, 65% through Eastern Pacific, Central America, and Mexico

Cocaine Bound for Europe – 80% directly to Europe, 20% through Caribbean

Cocaine Departs South America – 54% Colombia, 13% Brazil, 10% Venezuela, 10% Ecuador, 9% Peru, 2% Chile, 2% Argentina

Cooperation is key to confront this global threat

Successful international efforts over the past few years have gradually narrowed the drug syndicates' field of action. Crop reduction and precursor chemical control programs have caused major shifts in cultivation and refining operations. Effective law enforcement operations have fragmented the large cartels that once dominated the cocaine trade. Better interdiction efforts force traffickers to constantly shift transportation routes to deliver drugs to market. Improved judicial systems make more likely the prosecution of drug criminals, while tougher extradition laws deny them safehavens. Closer international cooperation among governments and financial institutions has made it more difficult for the drug trade to legitimize its profits through money laundering schemes.

The threat posed by drug trafficking in the region has not diminished, however, and is unlikely to do so without a serious and coordinated hemispheric plan of action. Drug trafficking will remain a threat and a major source of corruption and violence in the Western Hemisphere for the next several years and will continue to be an important factor in hemispheric relations. Tremendous wealth will continue to allow drug traffickers to use political influence, bribery, and alliances with insurgents and paramilitary groups to challenge local and national security forces, intimidate the populace and undermine governments. Even after suffering considerable losses, the drug trade's wealth, power, and organization equal or even exceed the resources of many governments.

Conclusion

A key underlying premise of the hemispheric drug control strategy is to promote long-term change in key national counterdrug institutions of the main drug source and transit countries. Though we can all take pride in our progress at the end of the century, we are still a long way from putting the drug trade out of business. As one of the pillars of international organized crime, the drug trade remains a formidable enemy. This is our greatest challenge.